

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
KATHLEEN
BLISS

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PARLIAMENT HAS REASSEMBLED after the recess for what is bound to be a critical session. The hammer blows will come not from the proposals of the Government or the challenges of the Opposition but from relentless events. The melting away of the dollars, the hard struggle to pay our way, the harsh realities of international politics—these things will force themselves on the minds of the leaders of the political and economic life of the nation, strain their nerves, fray their tempers and call for the greatest endeavours. Few men in the community more greatly need the prayers of Christians that they be not led into temptation.

THE CHILDREN'S BILL

The life of Parliament is not, however, made up entirely of battles against grim and inescapable realities. For all the members it is something of a relief to turn to a small, compassable field in which something can be done. The Children's Bill is designed to do something for that small and needy section of the nation, the children who lack a normal home life. No party issue is at stake ; the bill will clear up a number of administrative anomalies, define the responsibilities of local authorities (for lack of which definition children's lives have actually been forfeited) and

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JOHN ARMITAGE

institute a new trained service, the children's officers. The Bill is primarily the outcome of the recommendations of the Curtis Committee,¹ made necessary also by the abolition of the Poor Law. Coming at a time of national stress it may serve to remind many people that the struggle for economic recovery, with all that it means of hard work and self-restraint, would not be worth while if there were no children in our midst.

Few general attitudes have changed more radically in the last hundred years than that of this nation towards its children. No doubt we are more humane, kinder, more understanding of what children suffer and of what are their basic needs. The Children's Bill is a recognition that children need more than food, shelter and education, that they need personal care, security and the knowledge that they have a place in the world. The idea that the State should attempt to provide for those who have been deprived of these last things would have seemed fantastic to a society which had not been educated slowly and unconsciously by modern child psychology. But before we congratulate ourselves over heartily on our superior wisdom, it is well to remember that it is not only the beneficent rays of greater knowledge but the hard buffettings of the nation's fortunes which have produced this heightened concern for children. We adults are the children's debtors because they supply a very large part of the incentive to work and sacrifice. The high birthrate, the willingness of the nation to spend more money on its children than at any time in history, the maintenance of educational priorities in spite of economic difficulties, school meals, family allowances, the Children's Bill —these things are part of an unconscious search for ends, for things to live and work for, going on in a society which has lost its sense of direction and purpose.

The motives are mixed, both in the private and in the public sphere. There are parents who want children because they enjoy family life, are prepared to make sacrifices and to see their children go on to fashion their own lives in

¹ See Supplement to C.N.L. No. 294.

freedom ; and there are parents who decide to have a child as the last attempt to defeat boredom and meaninglessness. In the public sphere, too, there are those who see it as a plain matter of justice, that those children who have been deprived of normal childhood by the misfortunes and sins of others should not suffer, and those who have their eye on the making of citizens and the prevention of troublesome misfits, or who have the tidy administrative mind, irritated by anomalies and inefficiencies.

For all of us lurks the danger of corrupting that which we make into an end, and even this field of care for children, where so many injustices have waited so long for remedy, offers a subtle temptation. We may easily come to think that a society which lavishes every possible care upon its children has solved the problem of ends. We may argue that it is living for the future, working for other people and has nothing else to worry about. But there is no such way out. The children of parents who have nothing else to live for but their children become milksops or rebels, and just as the finest education a child can receive is that of being born into a home where the older members of the family live busy purposeful lives into which the younger ones are caught up, so in a nation to belong to a community which thinks certain things worth working for, and even worth dying for, is the greatest education in citizenship.

We might be able to see more clearly how far the very heavy expenditure of goods, money and personal service sanctioned by the nation for its children out of the public purse is a concern for children as *persons* and how far it is a subtle use of children as *ends* for all this furious national endeavour, if we were suddenly confronted with a claim to do something for children in other parts of the world. Can we go on steadily raising the standards of expenditure on British children and increasing the number of specialist categories of persons to look after them, without giving a thought to the children of, for example, Greece, where the after effects of famine are so marked and supplies of everything from medicines to exercise books so short, or even to

the children among the 63 million inhabitants of our own colonies, of whom only a minority have what we should consider by our own standards the bare necessities? Can we justify such an attitude as Christians? Can we even think it a wise national policy when the signs of the times seem so clearly to demand a great leap forward in men's sense of human solidarity and extra-national responsibility?

PRESENT POLITICS AND THE FUTURE OF BRITAIN

The question of national ends is the subject of a recent pamphlet put out by the Industrial Christian Fellowship under the title *Present Politics and the Future of Britain: a Christian Estimate*.¹ The criticism of the pamphlet is levelled at Socialists and Conservatives alike. The Government, while it is making laudable efforts to banish competitive strife in industry through State control, is blind to the fact that the fundamental conflict to-day is not so much between capital and labour, or between capitalists, or between producer and consumer in one country, as between the producers, workers and consumers in one country and in others. The Conservatives again, in their *Industrial Charter*, assume that the only choice before the people of Britain is between a vast increase in the export of machine manufactures or mass emigration. They insist consequently that "the demand for goods and services should always be maintained at a level which will offer jobs to all who are willing to work". The ancient Christian doctrine, that is to say, that production is for man, is distorted into the dictum that man is for production, meaning such production as a false economy needs to keep itself going. For dealing with Britain's real problem, which arises from a refusal to face the underlying purposes which govern economic life, no party has any policy at all.

The peril to the future of Britain in the view of the authors of the pamphlet lies not only in the neglect of ends but in blindness to facts. The nineteenth century basis of European prosperity has disappeared for ever, but British politicians do not seem to have taken in this fact, or if they have they

¹ I.C.F., 1 The Broadway, Westminster, S.W. 1. 2s.

do not act upon it. Every country is setting up industries and the monopoly of production which Britain once possessed has gone. Gone too is the cheap food which made Britain's industrial specialization possible: food is now not cheap but dear. There is only one way in which the crisis can be surmounted. It is that "we should renounce the tradition, derived from the Industrial Revolution, of laying the foundations of our life in the world market, and undertake the task of laying these foundations in our land".

In regard to this new standard of life which is to bring deliverance, the pamphlet is not as illuminating as it might be. The authors formulate their suggested policy as follows:—

"(1) The redressing of the overbalance of industrialism and its consequent ceaseless export drive, and a return to life based upon the utilization of her own resources, involving a great development of agriculture.

(2) The restoration of true trade as the exchange of natural surpluses—a trade which is the friendly interchange of mutually needed goods, and in which there can be no thought of trade war.

(3) The setting of money in its proper place within human culture—the overthrow of its barbarous dictatorship, and its reduction to its true functional operation."

It is certainly good that people should be urged to ask themselves what all their restless activity is *for*, and call in question the things that men in general too easily take for granted.¹ It is not quite so clear why the I.C.F. pamphlet should bear the sub-title: *A Christian Estimate*. A great deal that is said in this pamphlet could equally well be said by those who are animated in the main by enlightened self-interest. The argument is buttressed by copious quotations from secular authorities, and one of the prophetic voices to which appeal is made is a leading article in *The Daily Mail*.

The pamphlet makes a strong appeal for fact-facing, but it offers no evidence that with the change of outlook for which it calls it will be possible for Britain to sustain its

¹ This is trenchantly done in *Crisis and Reality*. The Christendom Group. S.P.C.K. 4d.

present population at a tolerable standard of living. That certainly is a question to which an answer needs to be given.

Moreover, in regard to the demand that a new balance should be established between the industrial and the agricultural life of this country, a number of large questions need further clarification. For example, while the writers of the pamphlet enter a caveat that they do not want to see a sudden and sustained increase in agricultural production by the application of big business methods to farming, they do not appear to recognize sufficiently either the extent to which this has already happened or the necessity for its further development. A letter appeared recently in *The Times* from a farmer protesting strongly against the publication of a photograph of a horse-drawn plough which, said the writer, was typical of the general air of unreality surrounding so much thinking about agriculture. Both machines and the principles of planning are being applied to agriculture and the average worker on the land, the man who after all has to do the job, wants to see many of these developments, wants to see stable wages, regular hours, payment for overtime, a lifting of the burden of unnecessary work, increased efficiency, organized markets, stabilized prices. Modern agriculture is inevitably being drawn more and more into the industrial system. If hard events force us to apply an intensive drive to British agriculture this process will be greatly accelerated. There is no escape from the great human problems created by a technical society by flying from industry to agriculture. Those problems will pursue the escapist relentlessly.

PERSONALITY IN POLITICS

In the introductory essay of his recent book *Personality in Politics*¹ Sir Arthur Salter discusses the interaction of impersonal forces and persons in the shaping of events. "Determinist theory," he says, "may seem for a generation to make nonsense of the 'great man' treatment of historical development," but this is followed by a change of opinion: a Hitler appears as a mouthpiece of existing national passions

¹ *Personality in Politics*. Sir Arthur Salter, Faber & Faber. 1947. 12s. 6d.

or a Churchill, by an opposite process, "resists a hopeless drift till he ultimately reverses it". No task undertaken by the modern historian is so difficult as that of estimating the precise influence of a leading personality on events. Myth and legend gather even during a lifetime, and the picture of the person is hopelessly obscured by the passions and controversies of which he is the centre.

An example of such an influence has been enacted in the past few weeks. Mr. Gandhi has, by quiet speech and symbolic action, quietened the passions and allayed the fears which have brought such misery to so many millions. The return of Calcutta from violence and bloodshed to normal life last year and the fact that the divided province of Bengal did not follow the divided province of Punjab into communal warfare, are events of great importance in which his action was largely determinative. What the lasting outcome of his latest fast will be is unknown, but the immediate effect has been a release of tension and a reinforcement by one man's will of the general will for peace. It is, as the editor of *The Observer* remarks, "both surprising and saddening that so little attention has been paid in Europe to this event in Asia". It will also be saddening if this event in Asia is not pondered by those who have been called to be peacemakers by the Prince of Peace. We can raise all manner of objections, arguing that Mr. Gandhi has been strongly criticized by members of all communities in India, asserting with justice that not all his actions in the past have been as non-violent in outcome as they were in intention, but whatever caveats we enter the fact remains that this frail old man who has spent a lifetime denying that peace is the outcome of power has challenged some of the most rooted assumptions of this power-ridden world.

THE SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Armitage is the editor of *The Fortnightly*. He is also an all-round sportsman of distinction, a keen supporter of many a local team and club and an active participant in local Government.

Kathleen Bliss

SPORT AND THE COMMUNITY

By JOHN ARMITAGE

APART from the physical advantage to be gained from playing them—and this is considerable and not lightly to be disregarded—games perform five main functions for the community: they satisfy a natural instinct to exercise a skill or to share in it by watching that skill displayed by others; they purge the emotions, for player and spectator alike, of natural combative and competitive impulses; they fulfil for the majority the need to be one of a team or one in the warmth of a crowd; they bring the peace of mind that comes from an individual or shared pursuit wholly outside the vexations and problems of daily life; and they support the individual's self-esteem by giving him the right to wear exclusive ties or, when successful, to be encouraged by the plaudits of the crowd.¹

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Games have performed these functions from the earliest days of English history. The lords of the manor, and later the gentry, jealously guarded their rights to hawk, hunt and fish, but they seldom neglected—except for a brief period in the nineteenth century—to provide some opportunity for recreation for the common people. At different times there were jousts to be enjoyed as spectacles, archery and slinging of stones for the exercise of skill (and incidentally, if not primarily, for military training), cock fighting and bear baiting to satisfy men's lusts, football and handball games for competitive play, and many other pastimes for villages and townsmen from the twelfth century to the end of the eighteenth, when merrie England finally died after a near decease in Puritan days.

It would be pleasant to be able to record that the typical team games that we know to-day had their origin on village greens and in small towns in medieval times. But the whole weight of historical knowledge is against this supposition. Football, hockey and other team games before the nineteenth century were

¹ For an excellent examination of the part played by games at school see the chapter "Athletics" in *The English Tradition of Education*, by Sir Cyril Norwood (John Murray, 1929, 10s. 6d.).

played without rules and were unruly battles much frowned upon by the town authorities and the Church. Nor is there any reason to suppose that skill at a game over-rode class barriers at this time ; this desirable development had to wait on the acceptance of rules, for cricket in the eighteenth century and for football and other games much later when the interest in sport shown at public schools was followed by the founding of many clubs. In fact there is more mixing of classes for games to-day than there has ever been ; there was more community spirit in medieval society, but each knew his place in it and mixing was neither desired nor contemplated.¹

How games began is not this essay's concern. It is mentioned because the relationship of games to fertility rites and later to Christian festivals makes an interesting study in itself. Here, however, it is enough to make clear that there is nothing new in the Englishman's love of sport ; nothing new in well-meaning—but often less physically robust—people worrying about their neighbours' excessive attention to games ; and even nothing new in the association of gambling with many pastimes. The social history books carry many illustrations of man's eagerness to gamble on games and the attempts of authority to check it. Henry III felt himself obliged to issue a decree prohibiting the clergy from playing dice or chess, and subsequent proclamations forbade this and that game on the score that they led to dishonest practices or were likely to keep the labourer from his work.

MODERN TIMES

The advent of organized games in the mid-nineteenth century was a direct result of the interest taken in them at the public schools. It was natural for those who had taken part in them at school, enjoyed them and believed in their moral values, to wish to extend their influence. This applied particularly to football, successful attempts soon being made to codify the rules. Clubs were formed all over the country by amateurs getting together, by large firms, by boys' and men's clubs and by Sunday Schools. Aston Villa is said to have had its beginnings in a Sunday School and it is probable that in the latter half of the nineteenth century the ex-public school and university parsons

¹ See the chapter on "Sports and Theatre" in *Mediaeval Panorama* by G. G. Coulton. (C.U.P. 1938, 15s.)

had more to do with the encouragement of team games than any other group of people.

But much had been lost by the common people besides the calamitous lowering of their standard of living as a result of the enclosures of the eighteenth century and the industrial revolution. Without State help and without town planning play for the mass of people was impossible. Great industrial towns had grown up with every inch built over, while even on the perimeter of big towns and around the villages there was now no common land.¹ This state of affairs not unnaturally encouraged professionalism. Football inherited from cricket the idea of supporting professional players, primarily for the amusement and to improve the play of the well-to-do, but although professional football teams quickly gained popular support and displaced in skill and favour the great amateur elevens, the present tremendous interest in professional football dates only from the extension of facilities for many more to play.

Prompted by many good and energetic people, the State's conscience about the part it should play in the provision of means for recreation began to be troubled towards the end of the nineteenth century. The Public Health Act of 1875 permitted any urban authority to "purchase or take out on lease, lay out, plant, improve and maintain lands for the purpose of being used as public walks or pleasure grounds, etc." Eventually it was this permission which enabled so many small teams and individuals to participate in games on grounds and courts which could be cheaply hired. The State system of education, however, continued to ignore games and recreation for many years after this, and in spite of mention of play centres in 1907 and a Board of Education departmental committee report on school playgrounds in 1912, it was not until after 1918 that the then elementary school child had much opportunity of learning how to play.

The present great national interest in games is thus a very recent growth and it is not surprising that its impact on social life has been emphatic. If the pools and other forms of betting

¹ B. Seebohm Rowntree records in his second social survey of York *Poverty and Progress* (Longmans Green, 1941, 15s.) the inadequacy of playing fields and the collapse of a team when their piece of waste land was built upon. And York is a small city with open country within easy reach.

are taken into account, games must now be recognized as the biggest part by far of the entertainment industry. Counting the professionals who play them, the manufacturers who supply the implements, the employees of the organizations which manage them, the journalists who write about them and the clerks of the betting firms, thousands now depend on them in some way for their daily bread.

Some people fear that this interest in games has gone too far. In a sense they are right; it is possible that the country suffers to some extent morally, mentally and even economically from the exaggerated importance attached to sporting contests and results. No doubt the hold they have over men's minds is sometimes immoderate; unquestionably the chance of big money does lead to undesirable practices and it would be hard to deny that some exhibitions of so-called sports fail to enoble man while fanning rather than purging the emotions of the spectators. There is also the present unreasonable indulgence in betting, a result surely not of interest in games, but of temptation and a national distemper. However, it is ridiculous to bewail, as some curmudgeons do, the present state of affairs as if an immoderate interest in games was yet another manifestation of the country's decline. Such people would do well to remind themselves of the essential truth that all that has happened in the last fifty years is an extension of the privilege to take an excessive interest in games; it is no longer confined to those who went to public schools.

A ROUGH CLASSIFICATION

It is confusing really to lump games together as if they formed one subject. As the functions they perform show, they possess many different qualities and it is the nature of man as well as his skill which decides for him his favourite recreation. I make here for the purposes of argument an attempt to group games into fairly distinct types. Such an action is hard to justify as there are so many games which do not fall neatly into any pattern, yet an examination along these lines does help to assess the needs of man by indicating the manner in which he has met them.

First, then, there are the gentle and contemplative sports or games like cricket, fishing and bowls. The undesirable elements

—such as are readily assumed to be nationally and socially undesirable—are practically non-existent in these three although their following is immense. These games are full of sweetness—as the literature of cricket and fishing amply testifies ; they are a joy to indulge in, a solace to watch and their influence for good, through their ability to tranquillize the mind, widespread. There are professionals in cricket, but they grace the game and seldom harm it. These men are not bought and sold ; they play for their counties as others do for native teams, by qualification of birth or residence. There are also on occasions big crowds, but they are crowds of men and women with minds at peace, gaining refreshment as another gains it from a country walk. The most serious argument that can be levelled against cricket—a fault it shares with fishing—is that it grips men's minds to the exclusion of their families and their work : it becomes an obsession. Cricket and fishing are indigenous. All over the country men in every walk of society read first in their newspapers the cricket scores and talk in the private and public bars about their fishing. The inclusion of bowls among the contemplative games is due largely to the age of those who play it.

Secondly, there are the physically energetic team games, all games of football, hockey, rowing and some minor ones. Rowing is of questionable value for health and is bad for those who need encouraging in initiative, but it is wholly free from vice and, as Sir Cyril Norwood has said, it does teach “ four or eight people to contribute their individual utmost to a common object ”. Hockey and Rugby Union football are also amateur organized and played. They are not popular games so much as family affairs. As a game for ridding players and spectators of surplus energy and emotions, while instructing them in many desirable qualities, Rugby football is without rival. The Rugby League game is mainly professional and wilder in its appeal without causing dismay.

It is, however, to Association football that our attention must be directed. This is, *in excelsis*, the working man's game. As a boy at least he played it ; as a man he may still play it and he almost certainly watches it. Over a million spectators watch the main League matches every week and many thousands more are present at lesser League games. Unlike cricket which, in spite

of gate-money, has to be helped by subscriptions to be kept alive, professional football is a business making good profits. Nevertheless, there is less money in football than is sometimes supposed or suggested by the size of transfer fees. Most clubs are controlled by local business men, genuinely interested in football as well as finance, and players are sound, hard-working men whose reward is not like film-stars out of keeping with the job they do. They are of the people and they are happy, most of them, to remain there.

But, undeniably, professional football has some undesirable features. In the first place players seldom have local ties and their services are judged not by the sentiment of community pride, but by the financial worth to their club, as far as the directors are concerned, and by their gladiatorial ability for the spectators. The players are thus little more than hired men, and whether it is caused by this fact or by the mass emotion of a packed crowd an entirely different relationship appears to exist between spectators and players at professional football matches than does between the same two sets of people at cricket in this country and at amateur games. The football crowd's displeasure, strongly and even coarsely expressed at times and aimed on occasion at players, linesmen and not infrequently the referee will also give a jolt to the inexperienced spectator nurtured on the playing fields of public schools. It is right to believe that a better spirit should prevail ; at the same time there is little malice in the cries. Indeed, we could travel far and learn a great deal less about the general level of twentieth-century culture than by attending a League football match.

The third group of games, which are the individually spectacular and egocentric games—curiously they are also the sociable games—include lawn tennis, golf, squash rackets and swimming. Swimming now vies with lawn tennis as the most popular summer pursuit, there being little doubt that the building of more open-air baths will be followed by an increasing number of young people who spend their leisure time in this way. Like lawn tennis, swimming is enjoyed by those who do it well, practising assiduously, and those whose enjoyment comes more from the mixed society than the actual participation in the sport.

In both lawn tennis (as in squash rackets) and swimming there is a noticeable covey of young ladies whose chief preoccupation is to display their charms.

Lawn tennis is something of a phenomenon—it is the only game which is really popular almost literally all over the world. No game has ever had so wide an appeal or been played so badly by so many of its devotees. For the practised players of games it is astounding to watch four players on a public court obviously enjoying themselves though seldom maintaining a rally for more than three or four strokes, if, indeed, the service gets into the right portion of the court. Obviously the attraction to many people is the game's power to bring men and women together in happy dalliance. It is thus a great family game, which is a strong advantage and if fifty years ago, when lawn tennis was still young, mother (according to old volumes of *Punch*) used tennis parties for matrimonial promptings, it is a credit to her perspicacity that her help is seldom needed now.

So far so good. In the lower reaches lawn tennis has everything, except skill, to commend it. It is a healthful, pleasurable, family exercise. At tournament level it is a different story. There it is an intensely individualistic game, cultivating all too easily ill-temper, vanity and envy. Tantrums and exhibitionism, on and off the court, are not rare and judged by the functions they should perform lawn tennis is the least satisfactory of all the major games. And this, it should be noted, is not the fault of the very few professionals. Golf can be passed over: in England it is a rich man's game, although there is a certain newspaper following for the better professional and amateur players.

BETTING

Fourthly, there are the betting games. These are primarily dog and horse racing. Association football is not really one of them, there being all the difference in the world between a race which is watched because spectators have money on the result and games which are watched for the game. And football is watched for the game's sake; it is just unfortunate that the parlour pastime of pool betting, trading on the world's favourite day-dream of being left or winning a fortune, should, mainly by chance, be symbolized in the results of matches at football.

As has already been pointed out, there is a long association between betting and games and a hundred years ago even cricket was not free from it. Nevertheless, betting has been fastened on to sporting contests only because there is a result to be declared after a specified time. It is the limitation of the time element which makes games the ideal vehicle for betting. In so far as betting and gambling are considered bad—and there is always the Stock Exchange for the richer folk—it was perhaps permissible for authority in earlier times to forbid the games that provided that vehicle. But it was not very successful even then and to-day would be impossible and undesirable. For as long as they wish to bet, men will find the means to do so. Games are not to blame and once again it can be fairly claimed by poorer people that it is the extension of the privilege that is challenged and not the principle.

One last group of games, the emotional one. In recent years Western Europe has shown a marked backward tendency to appreciate cruelty and sadism ; it is as if a thin veneer of tenderness imposed by Christian thinking has been scraped off. This tendency to violence has been reflected in art, in the themes of films and in sport. For us the question is how far should this tendency in sport be allowed to go. There is much to be said for the argument that offers purgation as the excuse for play and entertainment of a rougher kind. No doubt it is seldom that those who regularly attended big boxing matches leave the hall unsated or themselves spoiling for a fight. In the body of the hall, under the spell of blows, they have sometimes been less than human, but they are not so carried away that they do not immediately recover, exhausted and surfeited. There is a point, however, at which the dividing line between purging the emotions and fanning them to fresh excesses is overstepped. Such sometimes occurs in all-in wrestling, and other alarming and objectionable exhibitions which I have heard described, but never seen. It is time to think seriously about licensing such exhibitions for public entertainment. Though violence must be faced, it is wrong to permit the creation of an appetite for it, as lack of interest in and surveillance of some sports tends to do.

The State attitude towards games is now quite clear : everyone is to be encouraged to play and opportunity is to be taken to

provide the means. A future is envisaged, safeguarded by Acts of Parliament and King George V's Jubilee Trust, whereby every village can have its recreation ground, every school its playing fields and reasonable equipment, every town better open spaces including swimming baths. Unhappily for the country as a whole this desirable intention comes very late. There is a great lack of open spaces in nearly all our towns, the price of land is high and the economic ability of the country to provide now the necessary buildings and equipment is very low. Nevertheless, much can be done and is being done.

Sport is an unusual topic for the News-Letter and at first sight there may be little in it that appeals specifically to the Christian. Yet the part played by games in the life of the community is a great one and it should not be ignored. If games are good for the rich—or in these days the rather better-off—they must be good on balance for the poorer. If the manner in which the rich play games and watch games is better than the manner in which others play and watch, it must be because they have been taught to watch and play in the right way. Personally, I find all these propositions undeniable. The excesses of too great a fondness for games soon wears off, the advantages of having learnt to play them well, the lessons they teach and the friendships they make last for ever. The older Christian is thus interested in promoting games for his neighbour as well as for himself. His chances of doing this are now less than they were, but he can still come down in favour of the good game against the bad, still help to save a piece of land for a playground, still assist a young club by becoming a member of the committee, still encourage people to play rather than to watch, and still make new friendships.

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